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ABSTRACT

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Dewey's Pragmatism in The Postmodern Age of Communication Studies: Separating The Plausible from the Preposterous in Epistemological Analysis

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Abstract

Radical deconstruction holds the postmodern view that texts are open to endless interpretation and therefore do not reveal a preferred or stable set of valid meanings. This paper provides an analysis of some epistemological problems of reference that arise from this aspect of deconstruction, and explores ways in which access to the world's referents can be reestablished. In searching for a means of "recapturing the referent", as some hermeneutic scholars have described this problem, pragmatism is considered as an antidote in an intellectual climate where realism and positivism are for many writers no longer taken seriously. In particular, Dewey's instrumentalism is assessed as a means of recapturing the referent, thereby providing pragmatic solutions to some postmodern truth and knowledge problems.

DEWEY'S PRAGMATISM IN THE POSTMODERN AGE OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES: SEPARATING THE PLAUSIBLE FROM THE PREPOSTEROUS IN EPISTEMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

> '... the duty of journalists is to serve the truth. We believe the agencies of mass communication are carriers of public discussion and information, acting on their constitutional mandate ... to learn and report the facts and to seek the truth as part of the public's right to know the truth. We believe those responsibilities carry obligations that require journalists to perform with intelligence, objectivity, accuracy and fairness ...'[1]

It strikes this writer as odd that these canons of journalism continue to appear in current communication textbooks and survive alongside the postmodern critical philosophies that occupy our journals. For references to "the truth", "facts", "objectivity" and like expressions are under severe attack in current radical continental writings which claim Transcendental Idealism, hermeneutic phenomenology and French critical theory as their lineage, and which coalesce in the current vogue known as deconstruction which has recently spread from the field of literary criticism to that of communication as part of our rubric of "critical studies".

The issues raised by juxtaposing these canons with the epistemological viewpoints found in postmodern deconstruction are critical for the survival of a healthy democratic state. In the recent war in the Persian Gulf, for example, while just over five hundred and thirty thousand Americans directly participated in the conflict, there were about two hundred and thirty nine million others relying on professional journalists to convey an accurate account of what was happening. To whatever extent reporters succeeded in reflecting what actually

transpired, American citizens were well served. This is because our democratic ideal of promoting an informed electorate is invigorated (or resuscitated and revived) when the citizenry is able to act on correct and credible information about important civic issues; conversely, an information vacuum can contribute dramatically to the destruction of democratic ideals. The media, therefore, are obligated to play a vital active role in statecraft; as the ideal goes, both print and broadcast journalists are proxies for our citizens who expect reporters to function as midwives for the truth. In general, decisions about how to guide the ship of state are best made based on accurate information (for the same reasons that adversaries launch disinformation campaigns at one another during wars in hopes of confusing the enemy.) It is a commonplace of classic democratic theory that the possibilities for prudent and ethical statecraft (that which promotes the general welfare) vitally depend on the unimpeded flow of accurate information to all citizens (even to our leaders).

But aside from the myriad problems confronting journalists whose optimal working conditions may be summarily curtailed by government censorship, especially in time of war, postmodernism holds that citizens and journalists apparently no longer live in the epistemological world of Milton's Areopagitica either. For according to postmodern thinking, it is an unfortunate outcome (and one with which I happily disagree) that even under the best conditions, journalists might still be unable to meet their self-stated goals because of epistemological problems of interpretation. Therefore, one of the main concerns of this chapter will be to consider some epistemological problems of deconstruction with respect to the reporting of events. Discussion begins by reviewing some issues of

epistemology featured in recent communication scholarship which illustrates not only that such concerns are relevant to mass communication research, but also to those involved in other areas of communication studies. It is deemed necessary to begin this way so as to dissuade the reader from the belief that philosophical concerns raised by deconstruction need not concern scholars outside the realm of literary criticism from whence deconstruction came; rather it is important to see that the implications of deconstruction threaten the validity of all rational discourse.

We then consider ways in which the "postmodern condition"[2] as Lyotard refers to it, where judgments of truth and accuracy in the journalistic sense are rendered problematic, can be reconnected to referents in the empirical world so as to "recover the measure"[3] as Neville aptly puts it. Among the means considered to solve some of the problems of interpretation posited by the "postmodern condition" will be those offered by American pragmatism, especially John Dewey's brand of pragmatism called "instrumentalism".[4] To this end, attention is directed at contrasting and differentiating Dewey's ontology from that of deconstruction, a movement which claims idealist roots far different from those embraced by the pragmatic Dewey after his rejection of idealism.

Unlike idealism, Dewey's pragmatism starts with the active individual embedded in a pre-existent external world. For Dewey, active participation in problem-solving provides the impulse of the classical scientific method; this naturalistic starting point of Dewey's is significantly different from that of idealism, which invokes the primacy of consciousness over the things to which the objects of consciousness might refer if idealism permitted one to assert a prior "external world".

RELEVANCE TO COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The relevance to communication studies of epistemological differences between pragmatism and idealism is illustrated by the recent statements of Jacobson, quoted at length from an article published in Communication Research, a journal of the International Communication Association. Jacobson juxtaposes positivist and intepretivist accounts of language as used in empirically based theory in order to discover ways of validating inquiry in communication studies:

> ... positivism's communicative dimension was an attempt to characterize theoretical expressions wholly reliant on formal language yet nevertheless referring to the world.
>
> More recently, Thomas Kuhn ... convincingly argued that logical accounts ... do not go very far toward explaining scientific activity. The effect of this newer viewpoint has been to leave science without a widely shared account of ... Theory ... what a social scientist observes is then considered ... a function of what he or she expects ... to see. And once this happens, the universality of scientific results is jeopardized ..
>
> Interpretivist approaches embody a different conception of communication. Hermeneutics will be considered ... though other schools might do as well. In a hermeneutic view, language references are anything but unambiguous, extensive, and formally consistent [emphasis mine] ... in terms of 'scientific language' observation statements may be offered, but two different observation statements about what is ostensibly the same referent will mean two different things, strictly speaking, when made by two different people, or in two different times or in two different places ... This view recharacterizes language as used in theories from a tool whose use can be evaluated logically to a much more varied interpretive process. Communication occurs through dialogic processes in which participants are constituted by the language they share and do not so much arbitrate truth claims as inquire into meanings of messages offered by one another.
>
> Typically, the implications of hermeneutics for empiricism are considered to be entirely negative.5

Before quoting Jacobson further, it is worth noting that while Jacobson takes the position that meaning of even scientific language is far from fixed in the hermeneutic view, he abstains from the opinion that if "the same referent can mean two different things ... [to] two different people [at] two different times or in two different places ..."

there really is no reason to deny, "strictly speaking" (as he puts it) that the same referent could mean three different things to the same person on separate occasions, or four different things on the same occasion, or an infinite number of things on any number of occasions. But Jacobsen's statements certainly imply as much and these implications could make accurate news reporting of even simple events impossible; it could make social inquiry unworkable even for hermeneutic writers who try to make their positions clear to their community of scholars who, while perhaps sharing common interests, lack the time of the ages that might be required to unpack the infinite polysemic implications of just one remark. If Jacobson were taken seriously, we might of course amend Heraclitus' famous aphorism to read "You can't step into the same river once"! Further, the technical auditor might recognize that the meaning of "you" in Heraclitus' aphorism would itself change even before completion of the utterance. At this rate, meaning might destabilize before it could even begin.

It is not known whether Jacobson is fully aware of this impractical (even preposterous) consequence; however he does go immediately to some lengths to offset it:

> The comparison of positivism and hermeneutics is useful for illustrating the communicative complexities of theory, and the pervasiveness of value even in scientific language. But in fact, recent philosophy of science has generated, independent of hermeneutics, numerous arguments along similar lines ... Importantly, recognition of interpretation is not uniformly taken to imply abandonment of empirical research or "reasons" in general.
>
> For example, Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962) has been widely read as a non-rationalist (mob psychology) account of science, but he [Kuhn] denies this reading and has responded with discussions of factors involved in good theory ... Steven Toulmin's ... alternative is not antiscience, but rather a basis for assessing whether theories are 'fruitful' ... These all are theorists .. who have washed their hands of naturalism and

> positivism but have no intention of doing injury to the endeavor of rational empirical inquiry in general.
>
> Abandonment of strict realist assumptions is a hallmark of contemporary philosophy of science. For this reason, another basis for justifying empirical approaches ... is required. The communicative characterization of theories acknowledges one direction in which such a basis may be sought, essentially one that is pragmatist in nature, one that allows ... epistemological assumptions as appropriate for selected research ends ...6 [emphases added].

From these remarks, it is clear that Jacobson considers pragmatism as a possible means of justifying empirical social science inquiry in our postmodern world; hence, the final objective of this essay will be to explore the promise of pragmatism as a means toward recovering the referent and reestablishing stability in the postmodern world where referential meanings and endless interpretations abound. Our discussion turns now to an examination of the problems of knowledge inherent in the doctrines of deconstruction.

THE LOGIC OF DECONSTRUCTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE KNOWLEDGE PROBLEM

A central tenet of deconstruction is the view that texts are open to endless interpretation and that texts do not reveal a fixed or stable set of meanings. For example, deconstruction as propounded by its progenitor, Jacques Derrida, centers on the radical hermeneutic view that "[t]he meaning of meaning [of a text] is infinite implication, the indefinite referral of signifier to signified".[7] John Ellis' reading of Derrida's views on textual interpretation is that:

> Meaning has become limitless, infinite, and indefinite ... no single final act of perceiving meaning is possible ... And the infinite extension of the process of signification is identified with another fateful notion: everything becomes discourse, i.e., since we are cut off from ultimate referents, there is only language.[8]

Epistemologically speaking, there is nothing revolutionary or radical about the idea that a text may have more than one legitimate

interpretation or meaning, but it is incautious to suggest by extension that all texts are by nature open to endless interpretation. However, it is not enough simply to say it is incautious; it is also necessary to show that, substantively and logically, such a position is untenable.

The inherent logic of deconstruction rests on assumptions that lack cogency and consistency, such that the successful communication of its position constitutes a refutation of its central thesis. For example, it is obvious that if Derrida claims, as he does, that since "his essential position cannot be stated as others can" because all meanings are indeterminate, then his later statement that "Searle had misunderstood ... his views " and that it "should have been clear to Searle" appears to be logically inconsistent with his claims for indeterminacy.[9] And whereas signs may bear an arbitrary relationship to their referents (as "tree" does to the barky vegetation to which it refers in English just as "arbol" does in Spanish --clear examples of arbitrariness, in that neither word resembles the other nor the thing to which they each refer), nevertheless, such arbitrariness clearly does not make meaning indeterminate. Quoting Ellis:

> To the contrary: it is precisely the fact that the conceptual system of English is the common property of its speakers ... that gives its words any meaning at all. As Saussure himself puts it, "the word arbitrary ... should not imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker ... Hence arbitrariness ... refers not to randomness but to the reverse, to the fact that there is a definite agreement on the particular system of terms to be used ... for unless that term ... has a place ... in a system ... there is .. no agreement, no meaning, and thus no language and no communication".[10]

Therefore, from a logical perspective, the notion of infinite meaning of a text, and the idea of permanently postponing meaning, or infinitely extending meaning, should make it impossible even for Derrida to

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articulate a sentence describing his own position in any determinate way. And while that dismal outcome might arguably be consistent with Derrida's position, such that we could accept the possibility that "his essential position cannot be stated", we could not then also allow his claim that "Searle had misunderstood ... [Derrida's] views" and that they "should have been clear to Searle".

Imagine the cognitive atmosphere if we accepted the scenario of endless interpretation. In writing a description, other meanings not entailed in the writing could intervene ad infinitum, ad nauseum; a writer (Derrida included), might be incapacitated in mid-thought. Further, the writer might feel a barrage of messages contradicting prior thoughts and not know which ones to write. Even worse, the writer could write them all, perhaps cancelling out prior meanings along the way. Such a writer might just as well write gibberish, or write with disappearing ink for all it would be worth! In such a cognitive environment, stable discourse could become impossible. The meaning environment could metasticize into an ocean of endless sense without reference, or could break down completely into a meaningless cacophony with no peace for any productive thought. What is truly unusual about this philosophical stance is that Derrida's expositors seem able to repeat his implausible assertions without awareness that such views raise serious problems of self-contradiction and substantive incoherency.

Further evidence of logical inconsistency and substantive incoherency emerges among advocates of deconstruction who assert, among other things, that one objective of their enterprise is to undermine, subvert and expose traditional logic and privileged meanings normally associated with given texts. The purpose for such criticism is purportedly to demystify and

debunk illusions of objectivity in the received view of referential textual meaning. For example, Miller asserts that: "Deconstructive discourse, in criticism, in philosophy, or in poetry itself ... undermines the referential status of the language being deconstructed".[11] Leitch agrees, offering this view: "A deconstruction then, shows the text resolutely refusing to offer any privileged reading".[12]

But if deconstruction targets traditional and privileged or normal views or critiques of particular texts as topics for attack, as it claims to do, while at the same time taking the stance that there is an indeterminacy in all text, then how can deconstruction itself succeed in isolating for criticism the "traditional" view? It seems to this writer that the project of deconstruction could by its own tenets never begin.

As pernicious as the implications of deconstruction's apparently nihilistic epistemology might seem for literary criticism and aesthetics, the impact of such implications for discovering the truth and accuracy of accounts of historical events, as well as on the interpretation of the meaning of the evidence one marshalls in legal trials, becomes even more alarming. For if we expand the notion of "text" beyond the written word, to: "all items of the world that can be experienced", including interpretation by a driver of his visual field (thus making the road a "text" for the driver), or a jury's hearing of witness testimony at a murder trial, thus making the trial action a "text" for the jury, then the interpretation of the road by the driver or the judgment of evidence in the jury trial by the jury become crucial for matters of prudence and ethics. In these situations, the need is paramount to recover the measure of the referents involved so that the possibility for <u>accurate</u> interpretation based on <u>valid</u> inference and <u>factual</u> <u>information</u> can be preserved.

For example, in reporting on events that transpired in the recent Gulf War, it is essential for journalists and historians to be able to assert with a reasonable degree of accuracy that at the very least the Allies' bombing campaign did not begin prior to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. So while it might be plausible to debate whether Iraq felt justified in invading Kuwait, or whether Iraq felt it had a legitimate grievance which might have warranted a possible invasion, or whether the response by the Allies to Iraq's invasion was just, it would be preposterous to assert that the Allied bombing campaign preceded the invasion. In short, at least some starting points are taken to be incontrovertible and not open to endless interpretation; these starting points serve as the grounding for all subsequent discourse on the "text" known as the Gulf War. Hence, in this small way, we can say that it is essential to grant that perception and interpretation of the world are at times veridical, and that the referent in these cases can be preserved. The problem with deconstruction's epistemology is that by annihilating the referent, it destroys stable discourse about the world, and by so doing, it makes it impossible to separate the plausible from the preposteorus in epistemological analysis. It makes accurate reporting impossible.

While such a position might be acceptable for literature (a view I do not share) it certainly is fatally flawed for social inquiry (i.e., law and journalism) where the business of determining truth and falsehood, and innocence and guilt, is conducted. Cronkhite traces this skeptical empirical perspective back to the ancient Greek sophist Gorgias, who held that "Nothing is. If it were, it could not be known. If it were known, it could not be expressed in speech". [13] In this view, Cronkhite sees a

> tendency to characterize perceptions and meanings as being actively constructed on the basis of relatively little information. The

> opposite extreme, the view that human perceptual mechanism is simply a device for passively registering external reality, was also extant in ancient Greece.
>
> Between the two extremes one can place most of the theories of perception and meaning that have been described since. Perception dependent on the characteristics of that which is perceived has been termed veridical ... stemming from the same root as the words verify, versimilitude, veracity, and vertitude, all relating to truth in the sense of isomorphism with external reality. Perception dependent on the characteristics of the perceiver has been termed autistic perception. To the extent that perception is autistic, it is also independent of external stimulation.[14]

Later, Cronkhite humorously points out Gibson's observation that

> persistent autistic construction of perception is unlikely because any organism that consistently constructed its perceptions independently of reality would, in Spence's memorable phrase, 'come from a long line of extinct ancestors.' Thus Gibson's position is that perception is veridical - that it preserves stimulus characteristics.[15]

If access to the world is to be possible, (if only in the sense that the accuracy of journalistic accounts of events can be reliably asessed sometimes), we need to look beyond the dismal postmodern condition implied by deconstructionist epistemology. In searching for a means of recapturing the referent, pragmatism is considered as an antidote in a world where realism and positivism are for many writers no longer taken seriously. Dewey's instrumentalism, while appearing to abandon strict realist assumptions, and positing pragmatic solutions to truth and knowledge problems, may supply a means of recapturing the referent. Before turning to Dewey's own exposition, it is helpful to consider how Neville lays out the problems posed for pragmatism in this regard:

> ... recent criticism, stemming from deconstructionist philosophy, is that coherence itself is impossible because the terms of assertion are internally related to the interpretive process, and this keeps changing, becoming 'differant' to use Derrida's neologism, as the interpretation moves on ... coherence would presuppose a constant transcendental ego keeping everything in mind at once while the process proceeds toward wholeness of vision.

> Pragmatism is the third common philosophical theory for rendering common sense suppositions about truth as faithfulness. In its epistemological usage, a usage denied by the classical pragmatists themselves, 'pragmatism' means that a proposition is true when acting on the supposition that it is true aids in fulfilling our purposes. This of course is a clumsy confusion of criteria for telling when a proposition is true, which successful prediction might be, with a definition of truth itself [emphasis mine]. Peirce recognized this ... stating : 'truth cannot be defined in terms of what serves our purposes because which purposes are worth having is among the most important things about which to have true knowledge'.[16]

Neville suggests that assumptions about the truth have fallen into confusion in the postmodern period, that our culture has retreated to the point that we lack appreciation of experience as truly grasping the world: " ... our culture has lost the sense of world. Truly, it has lost the sense of reality".[17]

In considering ways in which Dewey's philosophy might salvage the referent in our postmodern period, we focus on two features of instrumentalism which distinguish it from the postmodern critical perspective: first, we consider some ontological aspects of Dewey's instrumentalism, which unlike idealism, place human awareness firmly in a naturalistic setting of a pre-existent environment (or "medium" as Maturana and Varela refer to it);[18] second, we consider Dewey's novel definition of truth. Discussion of these two features of Dewey's philosophy is understood in the context of what Dewey saw as serious limitations of realism and idealism to account for the progress of science.

SOME ONTOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF INSTRUMENTALISM

Dewey heralded and respected the progress of science, and he rejected both purely empiricist and idealist philosophies of knowledge which failed to account fully for the success of the scientific method. For Dewey, one shortcoming of empiricism was that it failed to account adequately

for the principles of causality and induction upon which science seems to depend; in addition, idealist doctrine fell short for Dewey by failing to grant prior existence to the natural world which, for Dewey, persists antecedent to human experience of it. By contrast, idealism for some writers denies that "material things exist independently of being perceived".[19] Against this view, Dewey retained, (in line with Darwin) a view of the human organism as embedded in a prior world, which exists independent of perception. In such a natural environment, the human organism develops by learning to cope with external adversity, and by overcoming peril via intelligent negotiation of the medium in which it finds itself.

As a reaction to these shortcomings, Dewey developed instrumentalism, a pragmatic epistemology which neither posited the primacy of Mind over Things (Idealism), nor Things over Mind (Empiricism). Rather, for Dewey, knowledge and reason were neither fixed nor permanent, but were an ever-changing product of man's active engagement within the sphere of Nature. Hence, the dominant characteristic of Dewey's thought was not concerned with general theories about the ultimate nature of Things, but rather with how human agents actively acquire and maintain security in an ever-changing environment. For Dewey, "The essence of pragmatic instrumentalism is to conceive of both knowledge and practice as a means of making goods -- excellences of all kinds -- secure in experienced existence".[20] Hence, Dewey differentiated instrumentalism from the prior epistemologies of empiricism and idealism (as Dewey conceived them) by emphasizing agents' active modification and negotiation of the natural environment, and by rejecting fixed ideas of Truth and Knowledge in pristine form as occult leftovers of traditional philosophy. Thus Dewey

distinguished between "hypotheses generated in ... seclusion from observable fact which renders them fantasies and hypotheses that are projections of the possibilities of facts already in existence and capable of report".[21] Here Dewey advocates linking sense and reference to a pre-existent world of referents via experimental trials to make factual progress.

Yet he by no means wishes to dispense with all idealist and/or empiricist theoretical considerations in making advances in knowledge. Rather, he advocates augmenting (not replacing) aspects of these prior epistemologies (i.e , rational contemplation as well as empirical observation) with active manipulation of conditions in the environment. In short, Dewey advocates gaining knowledge based on experimentation: we make a change in the environment or our relationship to it, where the change is not random but directed; then outcomes are analyzed, and observed changes are used to suggest new activity that promotes progress. Consequences that accrue from our systematic varying of conditions are assessed, then used to suggest new activity, and so on.

Dewey proclaims that "the purpose of knowledge is to grasp reality"[22] (an obvious source of comfort for readers with realist biases), yet he stipulates that in achieving useful consequences, we by no means necessarily secure synonymy between our cognitions and real objects. For Dewey, we may come to know aspects <u>of</u> things without knowing Things-in-Themselves (The "Ding an Sich", as Kant put it). But for Dewey this is not a problem in the slightest, for the goal of instrumentalism is no longer to acquire knowledge of things in themselves but to correlate change and to index reliable relationships among sets of variables which we control according to both our desires and needs, and possible

consequences or outcomes which may coincide with our desires. Says Dewey: "The notion that the findings of science are a disclosure of the inherent properties of the ultimate real of existence at large is a survival of the older metaphysics."[23] In this way, Dewey shifts the classical problem of justifying scientific method from a search for final causes (general covering laws) to that of efficient causes (consequences or effects) in individual cases.[24] Hence Dewey advocates that knowledge be assessed not as a quest for securing an accurate description of ultimate reality, but as a means through which human beings can advantageously regulate their environments. And Dewey proposes that this enterprise be carried out by actively perturbing and disturbing the environment, noting changes that are conjured up by such manipulation, and by using information derived from such activity in future situations if it proves useful for survival and sustenance.

But epistemological problems ensue from such a move. For by replacing antecedent fixed laws and traditional notions of knowledge and truth as permanent universals, with varied "results" or situational consequences (albeit directed instead of random ones), Dewey invites the criticism that he treats too cavalierly the nature of the real and the true. However, it is fair to say Dewey acknowledges problems that arise via his shift from final to efficient cause. For while his instrumentalism emphasizes consequences rather than pre-existent fixed laws (remnants of the "old metaphysics"), he does not necessarily advocate dependence on experimentation to the exclusion of recognizing lawlike principles,[25] for if he did, he might have no basis for comparing results to past cases (or making inferences to future situations) when he conducted his experiments. Rather, he endorses experimentation driven by

reason and experience. And by so doing, Dewey smuggles at least some arguably traditional aspects of empiricism and idealism back into his pragmatic enterprise.

And such a move is a welcome aspect of Dewey s position in my view. For it seems that without some stable notion of an independent, rational faculty functioning apart from naturalistic observation, to permit the human agent to generalize (or to refuse to do so), there does not seem to be a sufficient mechanism inherent in observed consequences alone to ensure that information from past experience will be invoked in comparable, advantageous situations in the future. In short, if we wish to replicate a set of beneficial conditions efficiently, we must be able to apply some selective principles which allow us to generalize to suitable future cases but which prevent us from generalizing indiscriminately to every future case.

In addition, knowledge of how to gain control of the environment may not necessarily be secured merely by observing consequences following the manipulation of conditions, since some consequences may not be detected but only conjectured. In other words, scientific progress is arguably guided partly by cognitive inferences which may not be entailed by observation. This means that Dewey's shift from final to efficient cause may best be viewed not as a tradeoff of one for the other, but as one of emphasis, where consequences are to be viewed against a backdrop of causal laws (or lawlike principles), and not as a wholesale rejection of such laws or lawlike principles in exchange for observed consequences alone.

By contrast, were we to follow a strict interpretation of Dewey s position (one that eschews realist and idealist doctrines completely) we

would presume that Dewey advocates that observation of consequences in individual cases alone is enough to assure that we can acquire sufficient information to generalize successfully (and efficiently) to future cases. But such a pure results orientation may not be enough to tell us what particular aspects of a situation are the relevant ones so that we can replicate and promote fruitful consequences efficiently at a later time. Hence, we fruitfully employ both empirical and rational (realist and idealist) notions without which the pragmatic enterprise itself would be weakened. Therefore, in my view, Dewey's emphasis on consequences should not be taken as a wholesale rejection of generalization, since without some notion of lawlike principles beyond the data given in experience, the human agent's ability to recognize comparability from one situation to the next would be unnecessarily diminished.

From the foregoing, then, I believe Dewey's instrumentalism is best viewed as a modification and mediation between empiricist and idealist doctrines rather than as a wholesale rejection of and replacement for them. And while Dewey may wish to reject usage of the terms of the older metaphysics as a result of his ontological critique, he nevertheless retains some use for them in his natural world.

In line with this view, Dewey recognizes that while he would like knowledge to be measured in consequences, he also admits that experience can never offer up all of the facts (i e., there is always the possibility that if one waits longer, more consequences can be observed); therefore there must, even for Dewey, come a point when one simply decides that enough evidence exists to justify a casting off of intellectual agnosticism. Then we generalize. Says Dewey: "We cannot issue a general impeachment of our organs of knowing to perform their office".[26] From

this it appears Dewey leaves room for rational judgment not accounted for strictly on the basis of the observation of consequences alone.

Without going beyond consequences to account for the grounding of human knowledge, Dewey faces, in this writer's view, problems of radical subjectivism and relativism that spring from his view that the "individually observed case becomes the measure of knowledge".[27] However, Dewey remains frugal when it comes to explicitly granting the existence of covering laws: laws for Dewey are merely "intellectual instrumentalities by which we make determinations"[28] about the probabilities of an observable occurrence. "They are designations of relations sufficiently stable to allow .. forecasts of individualized situations ..."[29]

In summary, unless we view Dewey's philosophy as embedded in the real and the rational in some traditional sense (one that preserves at least some traditional stable meanings of the "real" and the "true"), we have little more than trial and error to help us progress. Therefore, as stated before, instrumentalism is perhaps best viewed not as a replacement for realism and idealism but rather as a mediation and adjustment between them. In line with this view, while Dewey declares that "the criterion of knowledge lies in the method used to secure consequences and not in metaphysical conceptions of the real",[30] he also anchors his pragmatic reaction against traditional remnants of realism and idealism by preserving aspects of them he finds useful to retain: "Nevertheless, in the end, thinkers in all lines are dependent upon the mathematician and the physical inquirer for perfecting the tools employed in their respective callings".[31] And in the same vein, Dewey credits realism with lending credibility to pragmatist doctrine as follows:

> .. no physicist <u>while at work</u> ever thought of denying the full reality of the things of ordinary coarse experience ... he

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> admits their full reality on pain of having, logically, to deny reality to the conclusions of his operative inferences. He takes the instruments he employs, including his own sensory-motor organs ... to be real ... If he denied the reality of these things ... the conclusions reached by them would be ... discredited ... It would be the highest of absurdity to assert the reality of these relations while denying the reality of the things between which they held [emphasis mine] . Finally, observation is resorted to for verification. It is a strange world in which the conception of the real has to be corroborated by reference to that the reality of which is made dubious by its conception.[32]

From these latter passages, it is clear that Dewey does not abandon all aspects of realism or idealism - what he does is shift those doctrines from their purely metaphysical moorings and transplant them into a naturalistic setting. It is this shift in ontology which is presently most noteworthy, since it enables the knower to come into contact with the referential world. We now turn to the task of assessing how Dewey's pragmatist enterprise makes judgments about referents.

INSTRUMENTALISM AND THE NOTION OF TRUTH

Dewey's ontological critiques of realism and idealism lead him in his pragmatic enterprise to emphasize active involvement with the referential world; yet his instrumentalism, while underscoring activity with and access to the Sphere of Nature, does not guarantee that what comes to be known through this involvement will be reliably reported. That is, mere access to referents does not necessarily ensure accurate reporting about them. We need, in addition to mere contact and capability, some means for determining the veracity of reports that are made. How does Dewey's instrumentalism differentiate accurate reports from those that are bogus? How, in short, does Dewey's instrumentalism address truth claims? How Dewey handles these issues is the subject of the remainder of this essay.

Dewey's definition of truth is introduced in this footnote to his Logic, where he adopts Peirce's view that:

> The best definition of truth from the logical standpoint which is known to me is that of Peirce: 'The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is what we mean by the truth ...'[33]

According to Copleston, Dewey

> insists that if it is asked what truth is here and now, so to speak, without reference to an ideal limit of all inquiry, the answer is that a statement ... is true or false in so far as it leads us to or away from the end which we have in view. In other words, 'the hypothesis that works is the true one.' In Dewey's opinion this view of truth follows as a matter of course from the pragmatist concept of meaning.[34]

It is clear from this characterization of truth that Dewey opposes theories of truth held as external and unchanging. For Dewey, truths are simply instruments for application in knowing the world of becoming which show their value in use. In short, they serve as functional principles. As Copleston notes: "This theory that there are no sacrosanct eternal truths, but that all statements which we believe to be true are reversible ... obviously has important implications in the fields of morals and politics."[35]

So important are these implications that philosphers critiquing Dewey have levelled some of their sharpest criticism at Dewey's notion of truth. For example, Russell has noted that while he is in almost complete agreement with most of Dewey's opinions, he is nevertheless "compelled to dissent from his most distinctive philosophical doctrine, namely the substitution of 'inquiry' for 'truth' as the fundamental concept of logic and theory of knowledge."[36] As Russell writes:

> Truth, as conceived by most professional philosophers, is static and final, perfect and eternal ... These can have no place in Dewey's thought ...
>
> Dewey does not aim at judgments that shall be absolutely 'true' or condemn their contradictories as absolutely 'false'.
>
> ... for Dewey, 'truth' is to be defined in terms of inquiry, not vice versa; he quotes with approval Peirce's definition: 'Truth is the opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who

> investigate.' This leaves us completely in the dark as to what the investigators are doing, for we cannot, without circularity, say that they are endeavoring to ascertain the truth.
>
> The main difference between Dr. Dewey and me is that he judges a belief by its effects whereas I judge it by its causes where a past occurrence is concerned. I consider such a belief 'true' ... if it has a ... relation ... to its causes. Dr. Dewey holds that it has 'warranted assertability' - which he substitutes for truth - if it has certain kinds of effects ... Did Caesar cross the Rubicon? I should regard an affirmative answer as unalterably necessitated by a past event. Dr. Dewey would decide whether to say yes or no by an appraisal of future events, and there is no reason why these future events could not be arranged ... so as to make a negative answer the more satisfactory.[37]

Russell's major criticism of Dewey's notion of truth turns on the idea that Dewey judges beliefs to be good or bad depending on whether the activities they inspire in an organism have consequences which are satisfactory or not. Thus, the truth of a past event for Dewey is to be determined not on the basis of whether the event actually occurred, but according to the effects of the belief.

Chides Russell:

> "... Suppose somebody says to me: 'Did you have coffee ... this morning?' If I am an ordinary person, I shall try to remember. But if I am a disciple of Dewey I shall say: 'Wait ... I must try two experiments before I can tell you.' I shall then first make myself believe that I had coffee, and observe the consequences, if any; I shall then make myself believe that I did not ..., and again observe the consequences ... I shall then compare the two sets of consequences, to see which I found the more satisfactory. If there is a balance on one side, I shall decide for that answer .. surely this is absurd."[38]

Russell's criticism may be taken as waggish mischief which, with all due respect to Dewey's notion of truth, fails to distinguish between scientific propositions vs. historical ones, the truth or falsity of which may depend on different criteria. On this point Leander notes the need for Dewey to clarify his position on truth as it applies to scientific vs. historical propositions as follows:

> If one would formulate the pragmatic criterion of truth in a short sentence, the following might be chosen: 'An idea is true

> when it keeps what it promises.' The applicability of this criterion can easily be demonstrated in the case of scientific hypotheses and in general of ideas which stand some relation to the future; but how can it be brought to bear upon historical enquiry or, generally speaking, upon our knowledge of the past? Dewey would reply that historical scholarship also works with hypotheses, and that the verification of these hypotheses ... belongs to the future...
>
> Ultimately, then, the internal consistency or 'coherence' of our knowledge would seem to be the criterion of truth also in pragmatism ... Since present syntheses always guide our intelligent actions - whether it be in scientific experimentation, [or] historical research, - the results of our actions will judge the ideas that inspired them.[39]

For Leander, Dewey's response is that historical ideas are true if they can be verified, that is, if they can keep their promises when employed as working hypotheses. Dewey presents his reply in the form of this dialog between teacher and pupil as follows:

> Pupil: ... according to you, the correspondence that constitutes truth does not exist till after ideas have worked, yet if ... you make the truth of the ... landing of Columbus in 1492 depend upon a future working of an idea, you commit yourself to the most fantastic of philosophies.
>
> Teacher: ... the intellectualist began, if I remember correctly, with conceiving truth as a relation of thought and existence; has he not ... substituted ... an identification of the bare ... event with truth? Which does he mean? How will he have it? The existence of the Carboniferous age, the discovery of America by Columbus are not truths; they are events.
>
> Some conviction, some belief, some judgment with reference to them is necessary to introduce the category of truth and falsity. And since the conviction ... is ... subsequent to the event, how can its truth consist in the kind of blank, wholesale relationship the intellectualist contends for? How can the present belief jump out of its present skin, dive into the past, and land upon just the one event (that as past is gone forever) which, by definition, constitutes its truth? ... how (could) we manage to know when one thought lands ... on the ... head of something past... while another thought comes down on the wrong thing in the past?
>
> Pupil: Well, of course, knowledge of the past is very mysterious, but how is the pragmatist any better off?

> Teacher: The reply to that may be inferred ... the past event has left effects, consequences that are present and that will continue ... Our belief about it ...must also ... have ... effects. If these two sets of effects interlock harmoniously, then the judgment is true. If perchance the past event had no discoverable consequences or our thought of it can work out to no assignable difference anywhere, then there is no possibility of genuine judgment.[40]

Unfortunately, like Russell, I cannot agree with Dewey on this definition of truth. For it seems to be wishful thinking to believe that all past events leave traces that act as distinctive identifiers of themselves. A fire resulting from arson may not feature consequences different from one that occurred by accident; an insurance investigation might search for clues in vain, yet the truth of the matter would not change. In general, I reject the view that the occurrence of a past event is dependent on discoverable consequences in order for a statement asserting its occurence to be true; it is entirely possible for events to go undetected: amoeba leave no bones, wedding rings, or thumb prints -- sometimes they leave no amoeba. In human affairs, it is entirely possible that if a murderer covers his crime sufficiently, such that he leaves no identifying trace of his act, then it is still in principle no less true to say of his victim that he was murdered than that he disappeared.

The effect or consequence of a murderer's act may be a corpse; but the corpse may fail to provide a definitive link to the evildoer who committed the murder. The murder can appear to be a suicide; in such cases, the evidence may not identify the agent involved in its creation. Even if we maintain a distinction between scientific and historical propositions, based on the possibility of replication in the former but not the latter case in order to determine truth value, we still must admit, at least in principle, that past events which may give rise to a particular effect may nevertheless remain undiscovered. Yet while the

methods for determining the truth of historical claims may differ from those used to assess scientific ones, the differences need not force us to abstain from correctly applying the notion of truth viz a viz past events in the absence of observable consequences; for with respect to past events which cease to produce direct and observable consequences, we still can rely on the testimony of others. As Cunningham notes:
"Testimony apprises us of many facts not falling under our personal observation, whether they happen in our own time, or had place before we were ushered into existence. The truth is simply believed upon the authority [and ethos or trustworthiness] of the witness giving testimony."[41]

Of course, Cunningham goes to some lengths to delineate how one recognizes when optimal conditions of credibility have been reached with respect to the truth or falsity of past occurrences; entities such as witnesses, testimony, authority, credulity, evidence, corroboration, agreement, authenticity, integrity, morality, and reason, are presented as considerations used to decide the truth of propositions (both historical and scientific) by individuals too late to detect and to link specific consequences with causes directly.[42]

However, Cunningham also rejects the identification of the truth of a judgment with its utility:

> It is evident that the criterion of truth should be immutable and universal, for a changeable or relative criterion makes truth itself changeable, and logically leads to skepticism .. utility cannot be admitted as a criterion of truth, for the same assertion can be ... useful for one but not another.
>
> Moreover, that cannot be the universal and only test which cannot be known as such unless other things are previously known. Now the utility of a belief is unintelligible unless in reference to an end, to a known end .. Hence, the pragmatist criterion of the experienced success of a belief in ... perfecting human existence will not itself 'work' and cannot itself even begin to be applied, until we know ..[43]

In a more charitable treatment, Gallagher analyses Dewey's notion of truth, and in so doing recapitulates some of the themes from earlier discussion which sought to reposition pragmatism with respect to realism and idealism. Gallagher reiterates Dewey's view of truth as follows:

> A judgment is true if, in acting upon it, I achieve results which are useful and beneficial; it is false, if when I act upon it, disadvantage ensues. If any proposition makes no difference whatsoever to activity, then there is little sense in talking about it as either true or false ...[44]

Gallagher admits that Dewey's views depreciate truth to the level of individual interest:

> no longer is truth measured by the mind's openness to a reality beyond the individual, but it is viewed through the spectacles of a crass ... utilitarianism.[45]

Gallagher recognizes that among philosophers who defend the traditional concept of truth, many "have been repelled by the pragmatic approach and have exercised themselves in calling attention to its defects. The obvious aspects of relativism inherent in the theory makes their distates easy to understand".[46] But Gallagher goes on to stress that Dewey's philosophy is worthy of favorable consideration, in spite of the tendency of Dewey to "stack the cards against traditional philosophy by presenting a near-caricature of its position".[47]

It is admitted that Dewey is partly to blame for some of the disfavor which befalls his notion of truth in the eyes of traditional philosophers. For Gallagher, as well as this writer, Dewey fails to clarify some important issues concerning truth as knowledge - which - leads - to - fruitful - consequences. For such a view fails to account for our brute awareness upon which the recognition of fruitful consequences depends.

> Knowledge cannot entirely be reduced to the consequences of action, for there is an inexpungible necessity that we be aware of the consequences of action, and this meaning for knowing ... remains sui generis (emphasis mine). This would seem to entail the recognition of at least some types of consequences as fruitful in themselves; otherwise the process of reference to further consequences would proceed endlessly and knowledge would be by definition impossible. What I mean by calling my judgments true cannot simply be that they work out, because I must know it as true that they work out.[48]

As we can see, as an apologist for Dewey, Gallagher grounds Dewey's notion of truth in realist and idealist doctrines, such that pragmatism, viz a viz its truncated notion of truth based on consequences, is more charitably understood not as a replacement for the traditional notion of truth, but rather as an instrumental extension of it. As mentioned before, this treatment of instrumentalism is similar to that offered earlier regarding its ontology.

Confusion about Dewey's notion of truth stems from his failure to distinguish between truth and knowledge of the truth. For while we might not know the truth value of a proposition (about the Gulf War, for example) without conducting a test, the truth is not conferred, but is at best only disclosed by that test. In short, knowledge does not necessarily create the conditions of its own success. Hence, what vindicates one view over another, is the antecedent structure of reality and not merely consequences that we might observe. In the case of verifying historical claims, vindication comes when optimal conditions of credibility have been reached (i.e., see Cunningham's delineation, p. 24). For Gallagher,

> This realization is inevitable, unless we were to maintain the literally insane view that human thought creates ex nihilo the nature of the real. Dewey is far from denying the nature of the real ; it is only that his attention is fixed elsewhere and he speaks in neglect of it. There are many occasions where he makes it plain that our thoughts must take account of antecedently real conditions ... This means that there is for Dewey a structure in the real independent of all thought on our part.[49]

From the foregoing, it is plain that Dewey's philosophy, when taken correctly, must be seen in a larger framework in order to be fully intelligible. Ironically, when it is viewed in truncated form, the way Dewey neglectfully presents it divorced from grounding provided for it in the older metaphysical doctrines on which it tacitly depends, spurious radical subjectivist ramifications ensue, which were not intended by Dewey.

Hence, there is much to be reclaimed in the postmodern age by adopting Dewey's commitment to nature and the antecedent reality that ground his pragmatic philosophy of instrumentalism. For Dewey places Mind back into Nature, and by so doing, he places the knower back in touch with the referential world as an essential part of active experience. Dewey's disciples therefore are in contact with more than just "text" -- they maintain contact with the original referents that give grounding (and intersubjective reliability) to their inferences about "texts". Central to Dewey's doctrine is the view that the human agent is not only able to interpret the world beyond the text, but he or she can, in addition, actively negotiate it, cope with it, judge it, prosper from it, ameliorate it, separate fact from fancy with better-than-chance accuracy in it, carroborate witness testimony and cross-check evidence in it, conclude reliably and make accurate judgments about it, determine truth and falsity and seek and find security within it, and, through a combination of reasoning and empirical effort, "recover the measure" of the world for self and society.

However, while such outcomes appear to be feasible from the perspective of instrumentalism, such fruits can only obtain when reports given by active agents are given by agents acting candidly and honestly

(as "noble lovers" in Plato's parlance). The reports obtained from these witnesses and observers of consequence, become ever more worthy of their expression, and acquit themselves increasingly well as they successfully withstand tests of validation via all available means. It is this potential of pragmatic~~-~~ism to reestablish stable contact with the world's referents that is most welcome when viewed against the backdrop of postmodernism and the latest deconstructive turn in communication theory.

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